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ABSTRACT

In the first section of this paper, the author presents a rationale for incorporating audience responses as a teaching strategy in the basic speech course. The rationale is based on the goal of the course, which is to modify the student's communication behavior and his sensitivity to the forces which affect the communication process. The author reasons that this goal can best be accomplished if the student is exposed to a situation as similar as possible to a nonclassroom situation. The student in the basic speech course can best be assisted in self-discovery through an inductive approach, whereby data on audience responses to his speaking activities functions as the basis for his discoveries. In the second section, the author presents five examples of audience measurement procedures: the Hovland attention, comprehension, acceptance scale; the Likert-type attitude scales; a general rating scale; a source credibility scale; and a demographic profile, with a sample presented in the appendix. He also provides guidelines for applying audience rating scales in the classroom. (RN)

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APPLICATIONS FROM RESEARCH CONCERNING AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT IN THE BASIC SPEECH COURSE

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The topic of audience measurement has been a pervasive concern in behavioral communication research. This research has identified a vast array of demographic and psychological variables which affect communication and, perhaps more importantly, contributed a number of efficient and useful techniques, such as the semantic differential and Likert scales, for measuring audience response. The manner in which measurement techniques may be used in the basic course is the subject of this paper. Section I contains a rationale for measuring audience response. Section II outlines several specific procedures which can be used in gathering and applying audience response data.

Section I: A Rationale

The commitment to incorporate audience response measures as a teaching strategy in the basic course rests on several assumptions about the nature of speech communication and, consequently, speech instruction. The major assumptions are as follows:

First, communication is an "effects-oriented" process. The familiar "processness" label emphasizes the complexity and uniqueness of each communication event and, as a result, the relative nature of effective communication behaviors. The "effects" orientation suggests that communication may be studied as a process in which the source strategically constructs a message in an effort to secure the desired response from his auditor(s). The communication may then be evaluated by comparing the audience's response with the source's objective. The utility and appropriateness of the student's communication strategies is likewise judged using the effects criterion. The basis for such judgments is the empirical data obtained by measuring the audience's reaction to the communication.

Second, communication training is best approached through an inductive model. This model recognizes our inability to prescribe effective, generalizable communication behaviors, and suggests a more exploratory or experimental approach to speech training. The focus of this approach is upon identifying communication variables, and the generalizations which describe their function. The student is then encouraged to experiment with different communication strategies, to assess the outcome of his efforts (by measuring audience response), and to evolve conclusions about human interaction on the basis of these experiences. Ths approach emphasizes the importance of relating theory to practice--and practice to theory. It is hoped that through practice assignments the student will gain a fuller understanding of the importance and relevance of communication variables--be it Ethos, fear appeals, and/or a two-sided organization. It is further hoped that the student will become more sophisticated in estimating the affect of these variables upon his communication choices. Overall, it is hoped that the student will arrive at a more realistic and complete understanding of communication.

Finally, the approach outlined here assumes a speaker-to-target-audience setting. This assumption does not imply that the emerging focus on interpersonal and small group communication is in error. Nor does it imply that audience response measures are inappropriate for such settings. On the other hand, this assumption does suggest that the speaker-to-audience model, for which the classroom is uniquely suited, is a useful arena for communication training. Ideally, the student should probably be exposed to a variety of communication settings in the basic course.

Beginning with these assumptions, my argument for using audience response measures in the basic speech course may be summarized in the following form:

The goal of the basic speech course is to modify the student's communication behavior, and his sensitivity to the forces which affect that process. This goal is best accomplished by exposing the student to a situation which, to the greatest extent possible, is an analog of his non-classroom experiences. The crucial elements in this analogy are the "process" and "effects" focus. Learning is assumed to be most effective if treated as a process of self-discovery. In the basic speech course, self-discovery is maximized by using an inductive approach. Within this model, audience response data functions as the basis for the student's "discoveries."

Section II: Measurement Procedures

The type of audience response measures which may be used in the speech classroom are nearly infinite in number. Perhaps the only real limitations on the use of these techniques are the department's supply of ditto paper and the instructor's need for sleep. The available strategies range from recall tests that measure information gain, to attitude scales which measure persuasiveness, and observation procedures that measure behavior change. Regardless of the procedure used, a useful classroom instrument must (1) tap responses which are consistent with the source's objective, (2) be efficient to administer and tabulate, and (3) provide data which is easy to interpret and apply.

This section will describe five different instruments I have personally used. In each case, I will describe the context in which the instrument is used, and the manner in which I attempt to use the data for illustrative purposes. As is true of so many teaching strategies, I have no empirical data to demonstrate the effectiveness of these scales. My own personal judgment and student reaction, however, supports their utility.

Instrument I: Attention, Comprehension, Acceptance Scale.

Hovland, Janis and Kelley suggest that communication effects may be understood by applying their attention, comprehension, and acceptance model. Briefly stated, this model claims that all three responses are necessary for effective communication and that the three responses are necessarily sequential in nature. In an attempt to operationalize this model, I use the scale described in Figure I. The student's assignment is to develop and present a message which is interesting, easy to comprehend, and acceptable to his audience. After each speech, the class responds to the nine semantic differential type scales.

FIGURE I

Speaker _____ Topic _____

Attention	Interesting	: 7	: 6	: 5	: 4	: 3	: 2	: 1	: Uninteresting
	Dull	: 1	: 2	: 3	: 4	: 5	: 6	: 7	: Exciting
	Relevant	: 7	: 6	: 5	: 4	: 3	: 2	: 1	: Irrelevant
Comprehension	Easy to Understand	: 7	: 6	: 5	: 4	: 3	: 2	: 1	: Difficult to Understand
	Unclear	: 1	: 2	: 3	: 4	: 5	: 6	: 7	: Clear
	Comprehensible	: 7	: 6	: 5	: 4	: 3	: 2	: 1	: Incomprehensible
Acceptance	Correct	: 7	: 6	: 5	: 4	: 3	: 2	: 1	: Incorrect
	Bad	: 1	: 2	: 3	: 4	: 5	: 6	: 7	: Good
	Right	: 7	: 6	: 5	: 4	: 3	: 2	: 1	: Wrong

The class' reactions to each presentation are given to the speaker. He totals the responses on each dimension and computes a mean for the attention, comprehension, and acceptance scores. The data from this scale often results in several new insights for the student. For example, students frequently discover that a communication may be highly interesting and easy to understand, yet very unacceptable. On the other hand, students often come to question the accuracy of the Hovland model when they find that a communication may be uninteresting yet very acceptable. In addition, this scale may be used for comparing the reactions to different speeches and identifying strategies which may elicit more favorable responses.

Instrument II; Likert-type Attitude Scales.

Single-item Likert-type scales provide an efficient technique for measuring responses to a persuasive message. When using these scales, I employ a pre-post-test design. Students are asked to develop their thesis statement several days before the assignment is due. These statements are then assembled into a single questionnaire. The results on each question are then tabulated and returned to the speaker. After each speech, class members again respond on the same Likert scale. The results of the pre- and post-test may then be compared.

FIGURE II

Speaker _____

Thesis: Abortion Reform Legislation Should Be Enacted.

strongly agree (5)	slightly agree (4)	neutral (3)	slightly disagree (2)	strongly disagree (1)

Because this scale is a very general and superficial measure, it may be used to illustrate a variety of concepts. The data often suggests the problem that confronts the communicator when the audience's attitudes are either very homogeneous or heterogeneous. It is also useful in illustrating the concept of message discrepancy--the degree to which the source's position differs from the audience's initial attitude. Students frequently find that taking a very discrepant position will minimize their effectiveness and may produce a "boomerang" effect.

Instrument III: General Rating Scale

The speech rating scale in Figure III provides another means of measuring audience response. The scale provides three types of data: (1) a quantitative rating of the communication on content, delivery, and total impact dimensions; (2) a ranking score for the speaker; and (3) written suggestions for improvement. This scale may be used with a wide variety of assignments.

FIGURE III

Speech Rating Scale

Speaker _____ Topic _____ Rank ____

Content	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Delivery	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Impact	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Poor Fair Average Excellent Superior

The speaker would have been more effective if:

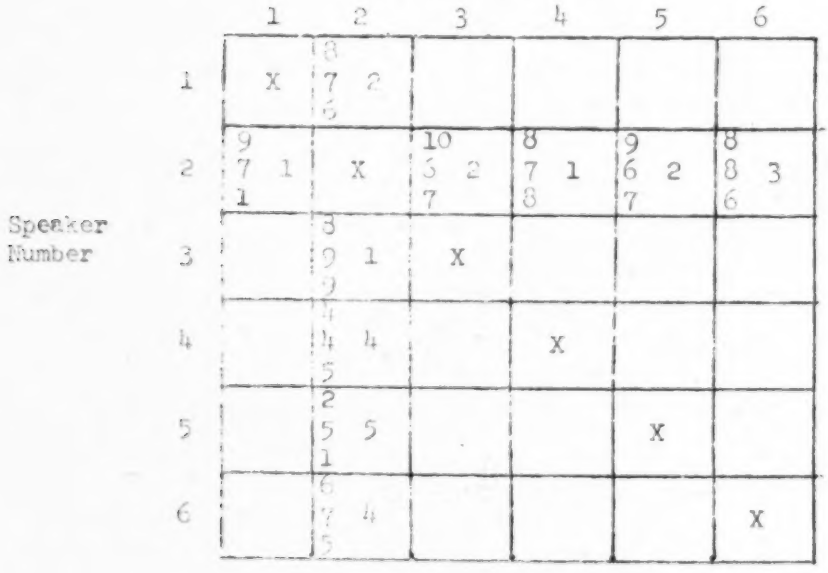
The quantitative data from this instrument may be placed in a summary grid (Figure IV). Each student is assigned a number which represents his speaker and rater designation. By reading the grid horizontally, the student can see all of the rating and rankings he received. The ratings and rankings which the students gave to the other speakers is summarized in the vertical columns.

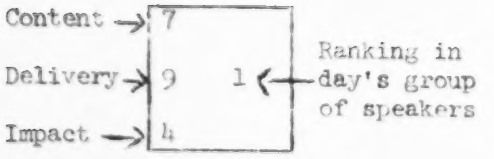
FIGURE IV

Speech Rating Scale

Summary Grid

Rater Number





Horizontal = Ratings received by student #2.

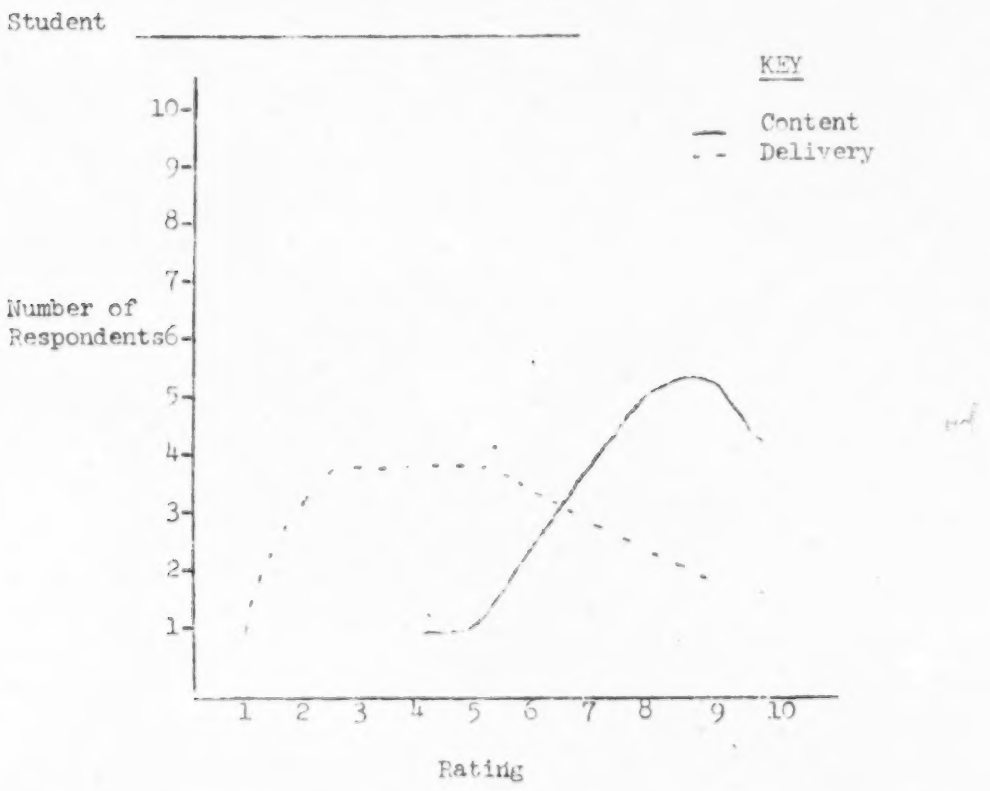
Vertical = Rating given other speakers by student #2.

In addition to the summary grid, students may be asked to plot a content, delivery, and impact curve on a graph like that in Figure V.

FIGURE V

Speech Rating Scale

Summary Graph



The vast amount of information provided by this rating scale may be used in a variety of ways. It is particularly helpful in illustrating the variability of audience response. Rarely does a single communication receive consistent ratings and rankings from an entire class. It is not unusual for the student to receive both the highest and lowest ranking from different auditors. This data may be used to demonstrate the principle that a communicator must aim for

the most favorable response from the largest number of receivers, but that a condition of complete success is unlikely.

The summary grid also demonstrates the differences among raters. Some students may classify all speeches as "excellent" while others will not exceed the "average" categories. Some students will vary their ratings greatly while others will cluster their reactions on two or three scales.

The summary graph and the written comments provide the student with direct feedback on his communication behaviors. On occasion it demonstrates very clearly the student's perceived strengths and weaknesses.

Instrument IV: Source Credibility Scale.

Behavioral research has documented the importance of source credibility as a determinant of a speaker's effectiveness. It has also shown that what the speaker says and does in the communication setting can alter his credibility. In an attempt to illustrate this principle, I have used the scale in Figure VI. The use of this scale is preceeded by a discussion of credibility, its dimensions, and the manner in which it may fluctuate. The student's assignment is to present a message which will result in higher credibility ratings. Student's are given the scales at the beginning of the class period and asked to evaluate the day's speakers on the first three scales. They are then asked to fold the scales and complete the second set of ratings after the speech. The scales are then returned to the speaker for tabulation.

FIGURE VI

Source Credibility Scale

Speaker _____

Expert	:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:	Inexpert
Untrust-worthy	:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:	Trust-worthy
Dynamic	:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:	Undynamic

(Fold Here)

Undynamic	:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:	Dynamic
Expert	:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:	Inexpert
Untrust-worthy	:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:____:	Trust-worthy

	Pre-Speech Scores	After-Speech Scores
E	____	____
T	____	____
D	____	____

An analysis of the data on this scale may reveal that the student's credibility increased, decreased, or remained constant. Through discussion it is also possible to identify the sources of the change, and the manner in which the speaker may have developed a more positive impression. The scale usually documents very well the principle that one effect of communication may be a change in the source's image.

Instrument V: Demographic Profile

The four measurement strategies described so far all measure audience response to a communication. Another type of measurement which may be used is the demographic profile (Appendix I). While this questionnaire does not measure audience response, I have found it can provide a basis for class work on audience analysis and adaptation. The data from this questionnaire can be used to demonstrate the effect of audience composition upon a speaker's rhetorical choices.

Summary and Conclusions

Behavioral research on audience measurement has reinforced our concern with communication effects. It has also demonstrated a variety of methods by which those effects, in or outside of the classroom, may be measured. The list of applications outlined here is, hopefully, suggestive--it is not intended to be exhaustive.

The usefulness of measuring audience response in the classroom is not a one-sided issue. It may be argued that classroom communication should be judged in terms of artistic, rather than effects criteria. It may be argued that the use of these techniques fosters an undesirable atmosphere of competition within the class or that the instruments are simply not valid. I personally feel that the answer to these arguments is that audience response measures are simply one teaching strategy. As such, they are not inherently good or bad. Their usefulness (or uselessness) instead depends upon the context and manner in which they are used.

My experience suggests the following guidelines:

(1) The instrument should be described and discussed fully before it is used. This assures that students understand the measure and it provides an opportunity to emphasize the importance of their responses.

(2) To the greatest extent possible, a free and open classroom atmosphere needs to be encouraged. This maximizes the probability of frank and honest reactions and, thus, increases the validity of the responses.

(3) Speech grades should be determined by the instructor. This procedure allows the instructor the opportunity to apply artistic as well as effects criteria and, it minimizes the development of potentially harmful competition. My personal approach is to raise student grades if the class response is higher than mine, but not to lower the grade when my reaction is more positive than the audience's. In other words, the class effects measures can help, but cannot hurt the student's grade.

If these guidelines are used then audience response measures can add a new, useful, and exciting dimension to the basic speech course.

Appendix I

Demographic Profile

I. Personal Information

Name: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____

Address: _____ Marital Status: _____

Do you live at home: _____ Religion: _____

Number in your family: _____ Political Party: _____

Have you always lived in Detroit: _____

Leisure time interests (hobbies, etc.): _____

_____

Career plans: _____

_____

II. High School

School attended: _____ Years: _____

Subjects which were most interesting: _____

_____

Extra-curricular interests: _____

III. College

Other schools attended: _____

Year at Wayne: Fr. So. Jr. Sr.

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Extra-curricular interests: _____